

**WASHINGTON (5 May)** – On Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) introduced H.R. 5208, the Student Visa Security Improvement Act, which would improve the background checks conducted on student visa applicants from high risk areas and enhance America’s ability to ensure, once in the country, foreign students are abiding by the terms of their visas.

“Everyone understands the important role foreign students play in our society. However, we must remain vigilant both domestically and abroad to ensure that terrorists do not use our student visa process as a back door into our country,” said Bilirakis, who serves as the Ranking Member of the House Homeland Security Committee’s Management, Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee. “Over the past several years there have been multiple instances which demonstrate shortcomings in our ability to properly screen and monitor foreign students.”

Earlier this year, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) disrupted student visa fraud schemes where individuals fraudulently obtained or maintained student visas even though the students were not attending class. Additionally, the admitted Times Square bomber, Faisal Shahzad, reportedly first entered the United States on a student visa in 1998, while several 9/11 terrorists had violated the terms of their student visas.

The Student Visa Security Improvement Act would require ICE personnel stationed at high-risk visa issuing posts overseas to review student visa applications and conduct interviews with applicants before they are granted a student or exchange visa. The legislation also calls for more vigilant monitoring of foreign students once they are in the country by ensuring they are active participants in the programs in which they are enrolled and are observed more often than is currently required.

“The legislation I introduced today would more effectively ensure that foreign students are coming to the United States to receive an education and are attending class once here,” Bilirakis added.